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***Harry Thode: Scientist and Builder at McMaster University.* By Manuel Zack, Lawrence Martin, and Alvin A. Lee. (Hamilton: McMaster University Press, 2003. vi + 171 p., ill., app., bibl. ISBN 1-894088-40-9)**

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***Harry Thode: Scientist and Builder at McMaster University.*** By Manuel Zack, Lawrence Martin, and Alvin A. Lee. (Hamilton: McMaster University Press, 2003. vi + 171 p., ill., app., bibl. ISBN 1-894088-40-9)

The true extent of Harry Thode's influence on shaping the course of scientific research in Canada will probably never be known. The last of the three successive authors of this account acknowledges that it is essentially a chronicle, rather than a proper biography. This is regrettable. As a research chemist, professor and president at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario, Harry George Thode was a central figure in Canada's scientific community for three decades and active for two more. He was an associate and confidante of men like Chalmers Jack Mackenzie and Edgar William Richard Steacie, who in the 1940s and 1950s put Canada on the path to being a serious player in scientific research.

Perhaps because it was shepherded to print by a committee the book suffers from inattention to detail. For instance, Pigott Construction is mentioned as the builder of McMaster's nuclear reactor, but the company's president, a prominent Hamiltonian, is referred to by only his surname. A Senate report on undergraduate education is called the Vichert Report, without identifying the author, most likely an English professor later prominent in the New Democratic Party.

On a larger scale, the book states that after Steacie died in 1962, Prime Minister John Diefenbaker asked Thode to take over as president of the National Research Council of Canada, then effectively directing the nation's natural sciences and engineering. Thode declined the offer; but,

according to the book, he later told friends he would have felt obliged to accept the post had he been able to see Steacie before his death. This is an odd account because Steacie, who had been under a death sentence from cancer, took ill at his lakeside cottage but died only several weeks later after being admitted to hospital. The Diefenbaker offer is mentioned neither by Christine M. King, E.W.R. Steacie and Science in Canada (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989) nor by Wilfrid Eggleston, National Research in Canada: The NRC, 1916-1966 (Toronto: Clarke Irwin, 1978). Is it true? Thode was much more in the Steacie mould than the two men who did succeed to the National Research Council (NRC) presidency in the 1960s and 1970s.

Yet there is no source cited for the Diefenbaker offer, and in fact, no sources for anything in this volume in the sense of citations from documents or interviews. All pages of the main text are a footnote-free zone. The absence of such sources greatly limits the value of this book for other researchers. This is not to disparage in any way the authors. I am sure they believed the Diefenbaker story to be factual. I only wish others could also look at whatever constitutes the evidence to draw their own conclusions.

With that major caveat, the book is worth well the attention of anyone interested in understanding the transformation that one leading Canadian university underwent in the 1960s. And in Harry Thode's case it truly was an instance of comes the hour, comes the man. The one-time Saskatchewan farm boy who took over McMaster's presidency in 1961 had already spent twenty-two years on the Hamilton campus and played a major role in establishing a strong science faculty at a university previously known for the arts, humanities, and Baptist religion. The first nuclear research reactor on a Commonwealth campus—beating out McGill University—stood as concrete testimony to Thode's drive and determination.

Even greater challenges were to come during his twelve years as president, the biggest being building a medical school that was as revolutionary in curriculum as it was bizarre in architecture. I was editor of the McMaster student newspaper during the battle with local residents over siting the medical school and this account well captures Thode's mistakes and success in that crucial incident. As well, the book makes clear that behind the farm-boy public demeanour and seeming modesty, Harry Thode was both proud of his abilities and ambitious to be able to give them full rein. Potential rivals, like Harry Duckworth and Howard Petch, wound up leaving for other campuses, where both flourished.

The authors rightly give prominence to Thode's keen interest in carrying out isotopic analysis of rocks from the Apollo moon landings. Although I reported on McMaster throughout the 1960s, I never saw Harry Thode as happy as one day in the early 1970s when he was in Houston to present results from his work on the Apollo 12 samples.

PETER CALAMAI

*The Toronto Star*